

Earth Day Marks Outreach and Progress for Tennessee

By Paul Sloan, Deputy Commissioner, TDEC

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, we again honor the vision of U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson and others who first issued the call to action for environmental protection. The leadership of Sen. Nelson to establish Earth Day was a response to the cumulative deterioration of the quality of our country's land, air and water. It was an epiphany for the nation when we realized the limits of our planet's ability to absorb human impacts and sustain health and abundance of its resources. President John F. Kennedy had earlier captured this awareness when he stated that "the supreme reality of our time is the vulnerability of our planet."

Much has been accomplished since this call for greater environmental stewardship. Congress and states have enacted a broad array of protective laws and established federal and state agencies to promote human health and environmental protection. Individuals, communities and corporations have launched important initiatives of their own to restore damaged lands, impaired waters and polluted air.

But as we acknowledge this progress, emerging environmental stresses challenge us for new responses. Growing population, outmoded land use practices, and depletion of water resources require us to develop new approaches to solve emerging environmental threats.

Whereas the original Earth Day help lead to national legislation, this 40th Earth Day will hopefully point the way to far more empowerment of communities and local based citizens to influence and direct environmental stewardship. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation supports this empowerment through education and outreach. In this regard, we recently posted access to new interactive mapping tools on our Web site at www.tn.gov/environment/gis. These Geographic Information System applications are available for public use to help protect water resources and promote effective conservation in Tennessee. Our department will also be hosting a Tennessee Watershed Conference in September 2010 to share an array of new tools for more effective watershed management and support of local watershed associations.

In addition, our agency has partnered with the Tennessee Departments of Agriculture, Transportation and Tourist Development to create and distribute throughout the state a *Guide to Tennessee's Watersheds*. This guide complements the watershed signs across our state highways and is further supported by a Web site that enables citizens to access detailed information about any one of Tennessee's 55 watersheds. Please visit www.tn.gov/environment/watersheds and view a wealth of information about your watershed, including its detailed Water Quality Management Plan and restoration projects that are planned, in progress or completed.

So, as we celebrate the 40th Earth Day, let us heed the words of Sen. Gaylord Nelson: "The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard." May we all seek to live more appropriately and sustainably for the benefit of ourselves and future generations here on planet Earth.



State Photo

TDEC Commissioner Jim Fyke (center) is joined by TDEC Deputy Commissioner for Environment Paul Sloan (left) and Governor Phil Bredesen (right) on Earth Day 2005 at Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park in Nashville to announce that Tennessee State Parks will purchase blocks of Green Power from TVA for all state park locations where renewable energy credits are available.



State Photo

TDEC Biologist Andrea Shea Bishop and Natural Areas Program Manager Brian Bowen at the 2006 Nashville Earth Day Festival are sharing materials on rare plants and threatened species in Tennessee while answering questions dealing with our 80 State Natural Areas.



State Photo

TDOT Chief of Planning and Environment Ed Cole and TDEC Deputy Commissioner Paul Sloan were joined at Earth Day 2007 by Margo Farnsworth, Cumberland River Compact, and Mayo Taylor, Stones River Watershed Association, to unveil a local example of the new watershed signs that would be coming to Tennessee highways. In March 2008, TDOT erected 187 watershed-awareness signs at key entry points along Tennessee's highways. With their simple green-and white logo identifying the approaching watershed and a call to "Help Keep It Clean," these signs are encouraging countless citizens to be aware of their local watershed and do their part to protect it.